

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

Minutes

February 18, 2016

Commission Members Present:

Opel T. Jones, I
Tim Johnson
Rev. Turner
Ivette Lopez
Shiraz Ahmed
Frank V. Eastham
Ivan Betancourt
Bianca Chang
Catherine Hyde

Commission Members Absent:

H. Taylor Walls
Ilene Kessler
Eli Sauerwalt

Staff:

Stephanie Chapple, Community Outreach
Coordinator
Barry Sanders, HRC Legal Counsel
Dr. Barbara J. Sands, OHR Compliance Officer

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. PUBLIC FORUM – Mary Campbell, OHR Compliance Officer discussed procedural steps from the beginning once OHR receives a complaint, through the end when OHR closes a case, and forwarded to HRC. Additionally, Mary provided brochures for all Commissioners to review & ask questions.

3. HRC CASES UPDATE – LEGAL COUNSEL – N/A

4. APPROVE MINUTES

December meeting minutes were approved.

5. CHAIR'S REPORT –

- Rev. Turner asked Commissioners to consider setting goals for 2016. HRC members agreed to establish a Goal Setting Committee – Ivan, Shiraz, Reverend Turner and Bianca agreed to serve on this committee. The first meeting will be determined once available schedules are confirmed. Per Frank, committee should use the County Code as a guide when establishing annual goals.
- Ivette will draft invitation to current and former Commissioners to a farewell/thank you gathering. Reverend Turner agreed to host this social event at his home. Details will follow from Ivette via email.
- Ivette agreed to oversee the Student Life Committee as Taylor's term will end on March 1st.
- **Discussion** - Opel spoke during the County Council's Legislative Session/Public Hearing on 2/16/16. Opel's initial comments were referenced as being a citizen of the county. Opel's final comments were spoken on behalf of the Commission to table the confirmation of 2 potential new Commissioners. Opel humbly urged the Council to hold off on these confirmations until HRC has a chance to speak with the County Executive's Office. For the record, Catherine shared that, in her opinion, the Chair and Vice Chair should indeed have leeway to speak on behalf of the Commission; she commented that Opel's request to delay a decision, on behalf of the Commission, was "perfectly reasonable, and is not of great magnitude." Per Reverend Turner, HRC will invite David Lee from the County Executive's Office to speak to Commissioners during the March meeting about the selection process of Commissioners, and open communication about the process. A list of questions will be given to David Lee. Per Frank's recommendation, when someone speaks on behalf of the Commission, as well as, if there is an opinion on an Action Item, Frank asked to be involved in the discussion whether through email chain or quick conference call.
- Ivan requested a letter to be sent to the County Council confirming that Opel's request/final comments were not on behalf of the Commission. Although the request was made, no action was taken by the HRC.
- Reverend Turner circulated a letter from the Superintendent about a special committee being formed on Diversity and Inclusion. Frank will co-chair this committee. Reverend Turner recommended HRC's Vice Chair and Student Commissioner to serve on this committee. An application to serve on this committee must be completed. Application is posted on the HCPSS website.
- OHR planned a multi-meeting conversation with student on hate and bias in response to the recent video that went viral. Catherine complimented OHR for executing this outreach program so quickly

during a critical time where students' voices, thoughts and feelings needed to be shared regarding this incident.

6. COMMITTEES/ REPORTS

- *Finance and Fair Lending – Vacant* - No report.
- *Legislation – Ivette*– Ivette State legislator has had a few bills of interest to the HRC. Ivette will circulate copies of House Bill 1478, House Bill 106, and SB 0024 regarding discrimination, re-entry into society status, etc.
- *Education & Community Outreach – Frank, Rev. Turner* – Per Frank, MLK Commission planned a wonderful annual program which was held on the Sunday during the MLK weekend at HCC. Additionally, the Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr./Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel Interfaith Service on February 5th was a huge success. **Frank attended both.** Colleges are beginning to talk about “removing the box” on disciplinary action on college applications. This is now being discussed throughout colleges across the country.
- *Public Safety – Opel & Tim* – Tim has committed to providing a 90-minute class on Community Interaction and Procedural Justice on 4/21 which is beyond his term. He will conduct this class at the Academy.
- *HRC Awards Program – Ivette and Bianca* – Bianca and Ivette presented the 2015 award to PFLAG during their monthly meeting in December. The announcement was also posted on the website, and an article in the Blade newspaper. Traditionally the Vice Chair inherits the HRC Awards program. Therefore, Reverend Turner will speak to Opel about joining this committee in 2016. Ivette discussed also finding other recipients worthy of this award, and will discuss plans with Bianca about a reception during the spring or early summer.
- *Human Trafficking Task Force* – Ivan agreed to chair this committee. Dr. Sands has been working with several community groups and organizations to discuss methods on assisting victims in need. Representatives from Safe House of Hope will conduct training in April at Miller Library. More information will follow.
- LGBTQ Committee – Catherine* – Freestate Legal did a study called “Living in the Margins” and presented it to the Justice Department and Foster Care department. Presentation was made at the state level; the committee was so moved by the statistics, that they sent out a series of letters to all state agencies asking questions about their service to the LGBTQ community, etc. Catherine would like to invite a representative from Freestate to attend an upcoming HRC meeting. Catherine will draft a formal invitation letter and forward to the Chair for approval.
- *Housing – Ivette and Ilene*– Catherine had concerns about the way vouchers are calculated as it relates to housing. How can the HRC bring this issue to the forefront as it is becoming a systemic problem in Howard County? Ivette would like to know which county office handles these calculations. Dr. Sands will provide information on which office administers these policies, as well as state vs. county policies.
- *Aging & Disability Matters – Bianca* – LHIC Community Awareness program on 3/24 at Miller Library. Bianca will forward flier to Stephanie.
- *Health Care Access – Bianca* – behavioral Health Group and HoCo General Hospital are working together on several projects open to the public. Bianca will provide more detailed information once she receives it.
- *Student Life – Ivette* – Ivette has agreed to chair this committee. Ivette and Eli will move forward with the development of a brochure to educate students on Transgender issues. This will be an easy-to-read brochure for students which can be distributed through the Counselor's Office.

7. STUDENT REPORT – N/A

8. STAFF REPORT/UPDATES – Dr. Sands discussed upcoming meeting and information on Anti Human Trafficking Committee/Commission, Human Trafficking training, residential requirement policy change for victims, and next meeting which is tentatively scheduled for 3/20/16. MAHRA's Human Rights Day in Annapolis cancelled due to inclement weather; new date will be announced and forwarded to commissioners once confirmed. See Executive Secretary's report for more information on programs and events.

9. NEW BUSINESS – Frank requested that new panels be updated at the March meeting to include new Commissioners to serve on and fill open panel positions for replacement of former Commissioners i.e. Taylor, Tim, etc.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS/UPDATES –

II. ADJOURNMENT – Meeting adjourned at 9:56 p.m.